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ABSTRACT

The author discusses the role of women in college admissions and elaborates on several options open to them if they are unhappy with their present positions. These options include: (1) a change of responsibility within the office; (2) progression within the office to a more advanced position; (3) a lateral move to another institution; (4) progression to a higher position elsewhere; (5) change of job to a related field; and (6) chucking the whole thing! It suggests that women must be willing to assert themselves in leadership positions and avoid the stereotyped notion of female indecisiveness, and concludes that the time is ripe for "uppity women to rise up." (Author/HMV)

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Remarks Presented by Rebecca R. Dixon at the Annual Meeting of The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, April 16, 1974, During Panel Discussion
"WHAT'S ~~MS-ING~~ MISSING IN ADMISSIONS"

I am no longer an admissions officer, and my defection to academic administration might be seen either as progress or regression, dependent upon how you view such matters. The point to be made, I think is that I was an admissions officer (at two universities) for ten years, there is a relationship between my "former life" and my present one, and, perhaps, the kind of work I am now doing represents an additional alternative to the woman who has admissions experience.

It is difficult to keep these remarks from coming off only as a testimonial. However, many of you will find something in common with my personal experiences which might be helpful -- or at least comforting -- and, as well, I have some generalizations to make about how women can seize hold of their professional lives and, to some extent, direct their destinies.

Most of you are here, I would guess, because you have a feeling you are destined for greater things -- for something different from what you are now doing, or for something better. As an admissions counselor or officer, you can consider several paths to follow:

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a change of responsibility -- to make life more interesting -- without a change in title within your own office

progression within your own office to a more advanced position as an admissions officer, say, as the director, or dean

a lateral move -- but perhaps with higher pay and more prestige -- to another institution

progression to a higher position elsewhere

a change of job, either in your own institution or elsewhere, but in a related field -- say as a financial aid officer, foreign student adviser, assistant dean of students, etc.

or, finally, chucking the whole thing and going off to open a health food store.

If you want a change, naturally you are going to have to make yourself not only visible to the people whom you are trying to win over, but necessary to them. You have to highlight, or develop as the case may be, your qualities. So take stock of yourself. What assets have you as related to the kind of position you seek? Let's say you'd simply like to reverse the notion that a prophetess is without honor in her own country, that you'd like to get more money, more reconition and a better title for what you're now doing. If you've been brooding on that point for some 8-10 years, my guess is that you'll remain an unsung heroine unless you do something drastic like streak through the office next Monday. It IS difficult to change your image if people are used to you, but perhaps it is not impossible.

Is your office hampered by inefficient data processing or computer services? All of us gripe a lot about the incompetence of our campus computer people. But their problems are not all of their own making. Perhaps you should be the one to zero in on the problems that affect your

office particularly and try to solve them. Attend the sessions here at AACRAO that relate, talk to other people, develop some interest in the area and then some skills. If there is a need for such skill in your office, you might fill a gaping void and thereby create a new position for yourself.

Surely there are other such needs, too -- personnel management, recruitment, better handling of transfer credits, international admissions, etc. Perhaps there are areas of need that are not the direct responsibility of Admissions but which relate, such as pre-registration orientation, financial aid, etc. To add a personal note -- I worked for the University of Miami for eight years but had three different titles while there -- reflecting changes in responsibility. Salary increases came with each.

If you set out to develop a new skill, I offer a word of caution. Don't pick something that is too esoteric, or that would be come obsolescent in a few years. For example, from my experience I know there is a great need for trained and knowledgable international admission officers. Foreign admissions is fun, and knowledge in this area is a valuable addition to even the smallest admission office. But it would be unwise to devote oneself to it exclusively unless that is seen as desirable by one's superiors. It would be too easy to be isolated -- and overworked. On the other hand, development of expertise in this area could lead to bigger and better things -- with international agencies, for example.

I think a good principle to follow is to develop general knowledge and ability about most or all areas of your office and then build up real expertise about one or two particular areas.

Let me sidetrack here for a minute. There are areas where women are commonly faulted for being inadequate. Don't let the stereotype become applicable to you. One is in the area of getting along or managing other women. I remember saying as a young woman, after only several summers of work during college, that I greatly preferred to work with men than with women -- that women were trivial, tedious, complainers and boring. Fortunately, I have since had the opportunity to work with several very gifted women who had positions of leadership, as well as with clerical staffs, who, despite personal idiocyncrasies, formed the backbone of the office and kept it running while the so-called office leaders were out conducting their political battles. Nevertheless, I cannot stress too heavily the necessity for, not only getting along with the people (most often women) whom you have to supervise, but learning to lead them. You have to decide on the best distance to preserve between you and them. With an older woman who has been with the admissions office ten years before you got there a distinct distance, respectful deference but evidence of firm leadership at appropriate times may be the best approach. With younger women, who are less interested in pecking orders, status, and that sort of thing, more informality, directness, etc. might be the approach. I do not mean to stereotype younger and older women, nor do I mean that office relationships should be contrived, but I do think there is a certain amount of calculation that goes into the establishment and maintenance of these relationships that perhaps we women should give some thought to and which men give too little thought to. Remember, they enter positions -- usually in an accepted role of leadership, whether or not it is deserved. Women officers, on the other

hand, I think, are question marks until they have established their positions in an office.

Another area where women are expected to fall short is in decision-making. We are thought to be indecisive. True, girls are raised to think that they have to please other people, rather than themselves, that they have to rely on someone else to make judgments for them -- where to go to dinner, what movie to see, even what college to attend. But I have been pleased to observe in recent years that, at least among the executive women with whom I have worked, if not among all office women, there is a very firm goal-orientation among them that produces much greater efficiency, sometimes, than exhibited among men in the same situations. I, myself, tend too often to think out loud. It would be far better to do my thinking quietly and then present conclusions that might be efficacious only when I have thought a problem completely through. My point is -- don't give anyone reason to apply the stereotyped notion of female indecisiveness to you. Better to become known for being solution-oriented, clear-headed and decisive. Fortunately, I think we women really have an edge on male peers in this area. Since it still is less important for us to "be successful", make a lot of money, support a family, get ahead, etc., we can afford to spend more of our energies, perhaps, on getting a job done, a problem solved, than the man, who must win political points at the same time. To illustrate my point -- how many times have you attended a meeting where every one of the five men present just HAD to have his say on a point -- even though he was redundant -- so that no one would leave the meeting thinking that Joe Blow had had nothing to contribute to the discussion.

As a result, the hour allotted for the meeting is gone, and no decisions were reached.

If you feel that you must change jobs or institution or both in order to progress or change, you will have to lay careful plans. Additional training may be necessary. I have ambivalent feelings about doctoral study, given the job market as it is today, but in certain cases, pursuit of a doctoral degree would be the only way. If you had the doctorate right now and, as well, ten years of admissions or administrative experience behind you, I'd say you were in luck. Universities, eager to press forward with their affirmative action programs, would be willing to consider you. But what the opportunities will be six years from now, I cannot predict. Master's degree work -- in counseling, business administration, accounting, perhaps computer science -- should be useful, and certain specific courses (statistics, tests and measurements, budget-planning, advertising, etc.) would be helpful.

You may wish to change fields. You may do this by training, by politicking or by luck. I think a switch of fields within the general area of college student personnel administration is quite possible. Be sure to look at the other end, though. If you enter the student personnel dean area, are you more likely to get to the top -- vice president for student services or dean of student life, whichever it is -- via that route or by the route of becoming director of admission? And how far do you really want to go? A good point to remember, for example, is that there are many deans of admission who hold only the master's, if that, but there are very few vice presidents for student affairs who don't hold a doctorate.

Similarly, if you switch to an academic area, as I have, you may find yourself low woman on the totem pole whereas in admissions you have a good chance of getting the top position in the office. It is a foregone conclusion that I could not become a dean of a graduate school without a doctorate, probably a Ph.D. at that, instead of an Ed.D.

Maybe a personal note here would be in order. I like my new associations with the academic, rather than exclusively student personnel side of a university. I'm taking my own advice and investigating the pursuit of a Ph.D. In the meantime, I find that ten years of admissions experience and two additional years of administrative experience elsewhere are very helpful. I find, also, that I have tailored my job to fit my abilities and that it is, as a result, a different job from that for which I was hired originally. Whether or not I progress probably will be a result of my own efforts -- efforts to fight some political battles, efforts to render myself indispensible to my office (if that is possible), efforts to work for a doctorate.

There is room, I think, for good administrators in higher education. Just look at the Chronicle of Higher Education at the positions available for deans of arts and sciences and directors of admission. I believe colleges and universities are as willing to hire women as men if they can prove their ability to administer. Goodness knows, there are a lot of incapable people around, failing at trying to administer. If you're shooting for a higher -- perhaps much higher -- position, you will have to be certain you have the right credentials. Then, you may have to change institutions in order to get rid of the "Prophetess without honor in her own country" image. If

your ambitions are not so lofty, or if circumstances prohibit your changing institutions, you may have to launch a quiet but determined campaign to make yourself both visible and appreciated so as to acheive advancement. I encourage you in these efforts. Despite some annoying white, male backlash that is apparent, I feel the time is ripe for uppity women to rise up.